CIVIL WAR ERA SLANG AND TERMS

A Writer's Guide for the American Civil war

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**The terms and phrases I have gathered here are found all over the internet, thus I cannot claim any ownership or even any particular wit for finding them. Therefore, I am simply offering this compilation as a complement to my Old West Slang page and as a small help to writers and readers who may drop by.**

**Absquatulate** - to take leave, to disappear

**Acknowledge the Corn** - to admit the truth, to confess a lie, or acknowledge an obvious personal shortcoming

**Arkansas Toothpick** - a long, sharp knife

**A.W.O.L.** - Absent With Out Leave

**Bad Egg** - bad person, good for nothing

**Balderdash** - nonsense

**Bark Juice, Red Eye, O Be Joyful** - liquor

**Beat the Dutch** - if that don't beat all

**Bluff** - trick or deceive

**Bragg's Body Guard** - lice

**Been Through the Mill** - been through a lot, seen it all

**Bellyache** - complain

**Big Bugs** - big wigs, important people

**Bivouac** - to camp without formal shelter or in temporary circumstances

**Blowhard** - braggart, bully

**Blue Mass** - refers to men on sick call; named after blue pill.

**Bread Bag** - haversack

**Bread Basket** - stomach

**Bully** - exclamation meaning, &'terrific!' or 'hurrah!'

**Bully for You** - good for you

**Bummer** – malingerer, someone who deliberately lags behind to forage or steal on his own shrift

**Bummer's Cap** - regulation army cap with a high/deep crown, so-called because it could be filled with gathered foodstuffs

**Bust Head / Pop Skull** - cheap whiskey

**Camp canard** - tall tale circulating around camp as gossip

**Cashier** - to dismiss from the army dishonorably

**Chief Cook and Bottle Washer** - person in charge, or someone who can do anything

**Chicken Guts** - gold braid used to denote officer ranks

**Company Q** - fictitious unit designation for the sick list

**Conniption Fit** - hysterics, temper tantrum

**Contraband** - escaped slaves who sought refuge behind Union lines

**Copperhead** - Northern person with Southern, anti-Union sympathies

**Cracker Line** - supply line for troops on the move

**Deadbeat** - useless person, malingerer

**Desecrated Vegetables** - Union, dehydrated (desiccated) vegetables formed into yellowish squares

**Dog Robber** - soldier detailed from the ranks to act as cook

**Dog Collar** - cravat issued with uniforms, usually discarded

**Duds** - clothing

**Embalmed Beef** - canned meat

**Essence of Coffee** - early instant coffee, found in paste form

**Forage** - to hunt for food, live off the land; also came to mean plundering enemy property for sustenance

**Fit as a fiddle** - in good shape

**Fit to be tied** - angry

**Forty Dead Men** - a full cartridge box, which usually held forty rounds

**French Leave** - to go absent without leave

**Fresh Fish** - new recruits

**Go Boil Your Shirt** - take a hike, get lost, bug off

**Grab a Root** - eat a meal, especially a potato

**Greenbacks** - money

**Grey Backs** - lice, also derogatory term for Confederate soldiers

**Grit** - courage, toughness

**Goobers** - peanuts

**Hanker** - a strong wish or want

**Hard Case** - tough guy

**Hard Knocks** - hard times, ill use

**Hardtack** - unleavened bread in the form of ¼ inch thick crackers issued by the army

**Haversack** - canvas bag about one foot square, which was slung over the shoulder and used to carry a soldier's rations when on the march

**High-falutin** - highbrow, fancy

**Horse Sense** - common sense, good judgement

**Hospital Rat** - someone who fakes illness to get out of duty

**Housewife** - sewing kit

**Huffy, In a Huff** - angry, irritated

**Humbug** - nonsense, a sham, a hoax

**Hunkey Dorey** - very good, all is well

**Jailbird** - criminal

**Jawing** - talking

**John Barleycorn** - beer

**Jonah** - someone who is or brings bad luck

**Knock into a Cocked Hat** - to knock someone senseless or thoroughly shock him

**Let 'er Rip** - let it happen, bring it on

**Let Drive** - go ahead, do it

**Likely** - serviceable, able-bodied

**Light Out** - leave in haste

**Long Sweetening** - molasses

**Lucifer**s - matches

**Muggins** - a scoundrel

**Mule** - meat, especially if of dubious quality

**Mustered Out** – wry term meaning killed in action

**No Account** - worthless

**Not By a Jug Full** - not by any means, no way

**On His Own Hook** - on one's own shrift, without orders

**Opening the Ball** - starting the battle

**Opine** - be of the opinion

**Peacock About** - strut around

**Peaked** - pronounced peak-ed; weak or sickly

**Pie Eater** - country boy, a rustic

**Pig Sticker** - knife or bayonet

**Picket** - sentries posted around a camp or bivouac to guard approaches

**Play Old Soldier** - pretend sickness to avoid combat

**Played Out** - worn out, exhausted

**Pumpkin Rinds** - gold lieutenant's bars

**Quartermaster Hunter** - shot or shell that goes long over the lines and into the rear.

**Quick Step, Flux** - diarrhea

**Robber's Row** - the place where sutlers set up to do business

**Row** - a fight

**Salt Horse** - salted meat

**Sardine Box** - cap box

**Sawbones** - surgeon

**Scarce as Hen's Teeth** - exceedingly rare or hard to find

**Secesh** - derogatory term for Confederates and Southerners: secessionists

**See The Elephant** - experience combat or other worldly events

**Shakes** - malaria

**Shanks Mare** - on foot

**Sheet Iron Crackers** - hard tack

**Shoddy** - an inferior weave of wool used to make uniforms early in the war; later came to mean any clothing or equipment of substandard quality

**Sing Out** - call out, yell

**Skedaddle** - run away, escape

**Slouch Hat** - a wide-brimmed felt hat

**Snug as a Bug** - very comfortable

**Somebody's Darling** - comment when observing a dead soldier

**Sound on the Goose** -

**Sparking** - courting a girl

**Spondulix** - money

**Sunday Soldiers / Parlor Soldiers** - derogatory terms for unsuitable soldiers

**Take an Image** - have a photograph taken

**Tennessee or Virginia Quick Step** - diarrhea

**Tight** - drunk

**Toe the Mark** - do as told, follow orders

**Top Rail** - first class, top quality

**Traps** - equipment, belongings

**Tuckered Out** - exhausted

**Uppity** - arrogant

**Vidette** - a sentry same as Picket but usually on horseback

**Wallpapered** - drunk

**Whipped** - beaten

**Wrathy** - angry

**Zu Zu** - Zouaves, soldiers whose units wore colorful uniforms in a flamboyant French style with baggy trousers, known for bravery and valor